

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

25 OCTOBER 2017

**REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING, SUSTAINABILITY AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2017**

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN (2017): ADOPTION

Issue for Decision

At the meeting of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation (SPST) Committee on 12 September 2017 the Committee considered the Report of the Head of Planning and Development - Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017): Adoption, attached as **Appendix A**. The report asked the Committee to recommend the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017) for adoption by Council. The reasons in favour of adopting the Local Plan are set out in full in Appendix A. The consequences of a decision not to adopt the Local Plan are similarly set out.

Recommendation Made:

That the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017) in Appendix VI, subject to minor factual and typographical corrections, which incorporated the Inspector's Main Modifications, and the Policies Map at Appendix VII be adopted.

Reasons for Recommendation

A decision to adopt the Plan, incorporating the Main Modifications, would mean that the Council would have an up to date and National Planning Policy Framework-compliant Local Plan which can be given full weight in planning decisions. This will enable the Council to take control of future planning decisions in the borough and help avoid 'planning by appeal'. The decision will help secure the 5 and 20 year housing land supply positions and will demonstrate that the Council is planning positively for the borough's development needs in parallel with policies which will protect the borough's environmental qualities. The Plan clearly sets out the transport, health, education, open space, affordable housing and other infrastructure requirements associated with future development. It provides increased certainty for residents, landowners, developers and businesses about the circumstances where development will and will not be acceptable. It also confirms the strategic planning policies which neighbourhood plans will need to generally comply with, providing valuable clarity for the groups preparing neighbourhood plans.

The Inspector has determined that the Local Plan, incorporating the Main Modifications, is sound when taken as a whole. The Council does not have the remit to accept some of his Main Modifications and not others.

Alternatives Considered and Why Not Recommended

Council could decide not to adopt the Maidstone Borough Local Plan incorporating the Main Modifications and the Policies Map. In this scenario (which is not recommended), the Plan would be revised in preparation for a new Regulation 19 consultation (at best) and a new Examination. Non-adoption of the Local Plan and a new Examination would have the following principal risks;

- Updated (higher) household projections for the borough have been published by DCLG since the Plan was submitted. A new Inspector would expect the Plan to take account of this latest evidence in confirming the objectively assessed need for housing (OAN).
- An increased OAN figure is highly likely to require the allocation of additional housing sites. A new 'Call for Sites' may be required.
- West Kent authorities are advancing their own local plans and there will be consultation on the new London Plan in November. There is some considerable likelihood that over the next 18 months or so this Council will receive formal requests to accommodate unmet needs from elsewhere. Having an adopted Local Plan which meets our own needs in full gives this Council a confirmed position from which to consider such approaches. Conversely, having no adopted plan in place would raise the prospect of whether additional allocations could or should be incorporated into what would still be a Plan in preparation.
- Short-medium term risk to the Council's 5 year supply position.
- A protracted period of uncertainty during which matters such as the weight to be afforded to planning policies, the OAN figure and overall housing land supply would be debated at each appeal.

The Committee may also be aware that the Government has previously announced that it will intervene where councils are not making sufficient progress with their Local Plans. The Government reasserted this intention in the Housing White Paper (February 2017).

Further, significant financial resources and substantial staff and Member time has been expended to get the Plan to its current, advanced stage. The borough's residents and other interested parties have also devoted their own time and resources, contributing in significant numbers at each stage of the Plan preparation process. Much of this effort would be wasted if there was a decision not to adopt the Plan.

In conclusion, it is considered that there are compelling and overriding reasons to adopt the Local Plan at the earliest opportunity.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Report of the Head of Planning and Development – Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017): Adoption

Appendix I: Summary of the Inspector's Report

Appendix II: Policies Map Changes

Appendix III: Adoption Statement

Appendix IV: Sustainability Appraisal Final Report

Appendix V: Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix VI: Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017) – version for adoption (circulated separately)

Appendix VII: Policies Map (booklet) – version for adoption (circulated separately)